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SUBJECT: UNHCHR REP BRIEFS AMBASSADOR ON INTELLIGENCE PURGING

REF: 09BOGOTA3621; 09BOGOTA3231

CLASSIFIED BY: William R. Brownfield, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

Summary

¶1. (C) United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) Chief of Mission Christian Salazar briefed the Ambassador on the results of a delegation of Colombian intelligence officials to Germany in early February to observe safeguards and procedures for protecting citizens from abuse of information. Salazar hopes to build upon the trip's success to help the GOC erect checks and balances to prevent intelligence excesses such as the Administrative Department of Security (DAS) surveillance of NGOs and international organizations. Salazar assessed that the Colombian National Police (CNP) and DAS were willing to collaborate with the UNHCHR while military intelligence entities still viewed respect for human rights as an impediment to their mission. UNHCHR is waiting for the GOC to respond with specific proposals on next steps. Separately, Salazar asked for USG support to extend the UNHCHR's mandate in Colombia, currently set to expire on October

¶30. End summary.

Colombian Intelligence Visits Berlin

¶2. (C) Salazar reported back to the Ambassador on February 8 about his recent trip to Berlin with select Colombian intelligence officials. The delegation was composed of DAS Director Felipe Munoz and representatives of the Inspector General's Office, Ministry of Defense, CNP, and each of the service branch intelligence services. Salazar said the purpose of the trip was to demonstrate to the Colombians how a modern democracy can safeguard information collected about its citizenry and thereby avoid abuse. Salazar conceived the idea after multiple revelations in 2009 that Colombian civilian and intelligence services had conducted surveillance and, in some cases, operations against human rights defenders, foreign embassies, and international organizations.

13. (C) Over three days the group met with various intelligence/counter-intelligence agencies, a German parliamentary oversight committee, and an agency charged with purging inappropriate information collected by East Germany during the Cold War. Salazar described DAS Director Munoz as most open to assistance on intelligence reform, mainly because his agency is "desperate for survival" as the Congress deliberates a bill to overhaul the scandal-ridden agency (ref a). The CNP, he offered, was the most advanced in protecting information, having experienced serious scandals of this nature in decades past. Salazar concluded that the military intelligence services were the least receptive based on their observations that such human rights-related reforms would complicate their mission in Colombia. Salazar figured that the Inspector General's Office, which acts as an independent ombudsman both in the justice system and public administration, could play a key role in monitoring the intelligence agencies. Inspector General's Office representatives expressed concern. However, that it would be difficult to oversee these agencies without expanded access to intelligences activities and data.

Awaiting GOC Response

14. (C) Salazar told the Ambassador his original proposal for the UNHCHR to help DAS purge references in its files to surveillance of international organization personnel had been rejected by his headquarters (ref b). Instead, he said he had discussed some ideas with Munoz that included the establishment of a permanent roundtable on intelligence to ensure the proper use of information. Salazar also thought the GOC could establish more "data protection centers," in which enhanced access controls are placed certain sensitive information. He proposed to sponsor an international seminar for NGOs and the GOC on establishing democratic controls of information. He noted that the intelligence law, passed in early 2009, still had features that had not been implemented, specifically, the standing up of an intelligence oversight panel in Congress. Salazar said he was waiting for the GOC to formulate detailed proposals in these areas for the UNHCHR to consider. Salazar reported that he had previewed some of these ideas with key human rights NGOs, who responded that any effort to improve upon the status quo would be welcomed.

Extending UNHCHR's Mandate

15. (C) On a related issue, Salazar noted that the UNHCHR's mandate to operate in Colombia would expire on October 30. He said his going-in position with the GOC was for a two-year extension of his current mandate, which includes ample latitude in monitoring and reporting on human rights conditions. While Salazar had not perceived any GOC attempts to trim back his duties in country, he said his objectives were to avoid any new restrictions to the UNHCHR's monitoring role and to maintain the publication of an annual report on human rights. Salazar suggested the push to renew should begin as soon as possible. He asked the Ambassador for USG support by making a positive statement to the Human Rights Council in favor of extension and generally supporting the initiative in Geneva. The Ambassador underscored the importance of encouraging the GOC's openness to international scrutiny and promised to pass the request to Washington with a favorable recommendation.

BROWNFIELD